

REPORT ON INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, AND JUSTICE AT HOLLINS

by President Mary Dana Hinton, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

On June 19, 2020, I shared with the Hollins community [my intent](#) to host a series of conversations with campus stakeholders to learn more about Hollins, its history as it relates to diversity, equity, and justice, and its work toward inclusive excellence. Understanding our community and how it engages diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice is vitally important as inclusive excellence ensures we are fulfilling our institutional mission and goals. Our commitment to being an independent liberal arts university dedicated to academic excellence and humane values requires that we be an inclusive community.

Over the course of several weeks in July, I held 11 meetings with over 150 people participating. It was clear from those conversations that Hollins is, indeed, beloved. This deep abiding love for Hollins prompted so many to speak up and insist that we do better regarding diversity, inclusion, and equity. The push to be and do more in these areas should not be viewed solely as a rebuke. We should also consider this moment as a call to embrace our liberal arts tradition more fully and to fulfill our mission for all we serve in our community.

The inclusion conversations focused on the following questions:

What compromises the experiences of Black students/faculty/staff? Of other students/faculty/staff of color and underrepresented students/faculty/staff?

As these conversations were launched in the context of the movements around systemic injustice experienced by Black Americans, it felt especially important to understand the experiences of Black community members at Hollins. As we think about our immediate and long-term work as an institution, it is also crucial that we expand our gaze and discuss all underrepresented community members' experiences.

What will institutional action look like? What needs to be addressed now?

What immediate steps could be taken to improve our community members' experience and become a more inclusive, equitable, and just community? These critical next steps are also vital in laying the groundwork for needed significant cultural change, which often takes longer to enact.

What will institutional change look like? What should we be working toward?

What long-term goals should be focused on as a community? What types of change should we anticipate, prepare for, and implement to ensure we are not only reacting to immediate concerns but also building a culture of inclusive excellence?

What is one big thing I should focus on first as president?

Several groups addressed this question.

The conversations around these questions were robust, at times filled with emotion, and clarifying regarding next steps. It was evident throughout the conversations that our community wants action. A palpable frustration regarding having these conversations without sustained subsequent action was frequently expressed.

This report shares what was learned in the conversations, what immediate next steps we will take, and what to anticipate as we become a community that practices equity, justice, and inclusive excellence in all we do.

KEY LEARNINGS

NEED TO INCREASE DIVERSE REPRESENTATION ON CAMPUS

Faculty and staff diversity

The single most frequent comment received from the series of conversations was the critical need to diversify the faculty and staff of Hollins University. Each discussion referenced the lack of diverse representation on the campus and the importance of having people of diverse backgrounds in roles across campus. We will begin to implement a two-pronged strategy in Fall Term 2020 to include diversity as a key component of the hiring process and to diversify the hiring process in the way we do searches. We will focus on engaging a [search advocates process](#) to ensure searches are equitable. We will also join the [Consortium for Faculty Diversity](#) to support the diversification of our faculty. We will collect and share voluntarily reported demographic data about candidates from Human Resources as searches unfold.

Counselors of color

Nearly every conversation spoke to the need to provide additional counselors of color. These counselors would serve all students' needs, but the lack of counselors from diverse backgrounds was consistently and frequently raised as a concern. Currently, Hollins has a part-time counselor of color whose hours were increased this fall. All students can also take advantage of our Student Assistance Program, which provides ready access to many counselors and specialties. Upon the lifting of the current hiring freeze, we will prioritize a full-time hire for a counselor of color who will have a strong inclusion background.

ENHANCED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL

The conversations yielded a resounding call for additional, ongoing, and impactful professional development related to inclusion for all faculty, staff, and students. Clearly the need for professional development must extend to all campus members and include topics such as diversifying the curriculum within courses currently offered and in the development of new courses, what it means to be an ally, and how to be an anti-racist institution. There were requests for ongoing training for campus security to ensure they understand the concerns students have about policing in general and how we can be supported by, and provide support to, our security officers. Likewise, we were asked to ensure continued opportunities for our athletic staff and our student leadership teams to engage in diversity training so that our students receive holistic support across the campus.

The conversations varied about how to effectively increase the numbers of those who participate in inclusion professional development. Still, there was a consensus that the institution needs to get broader participation in these conversations and that such events should be an explicit part of our culture.

“HOLLINS CAN BE A PLACE THAT CAN HELP LEVEL THE FIELD BY SAYING EVERYBODY IS VALUED HERE. GIVE PEOPLE THE FREEDOM TO SPEAK UP WITHOUT RISK OF DAMAGING THEIR CAREERS, THAT IT’S OKAY TO SAY WHAT’S HURTING THEM AND BOTHERING THEM. THERE’S SO MUCH TALENT THROUGHOUT THE CAMPUS, AND ALL NEED TO BE ABLE TO SHINE.”

“THERE’S A LOT OF FEAR, ESPECIALLY FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR IN REGARD TO REPORTING BECAUSE NO ONE WANTS TO FEEL ISOLATED OR REPRIMANDED FOR EXPERIENCING RACISM. RACE IS ALWAYS ON THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST. WE HAVE HAD A TASK FORCE FOR THE TRANS POLICY, COVID-19, AND OTHER ISSUES BUT THERE ARE NEVER ANY POLICIES OR TASK FORCES ABOUT RACE, MICROAGGRESSIONS, OR EVEN XENOPHOBIA.”

We will implement a robust portfolio of professional development beginning with this year’s faculty retreat, *Educational Equity in the Era of #BlackLivesMatter*. Conversation and learning related to inclusion will be a critical part of upcoming institutional addresses and communications as well.

We are also planning a day-long Equity and Justice Day for October 23, 2020. This day will involve a series of speakers and professional development opportunities for all faculty, staff, and students. We are working with Academic Affairs at Hollins and have reached out to the Association of American Colleges and Universities to plan this day of community learning. We will also create a calendar of lunch-and-learns for the community, to include faculty, staff, and students.

On September 22, 2020, we will have a campus-wide conversation with [Michelle Alexander](#). Leading up to her talk, we will host book groups and feedback sessions to ensure the conversations speak to the needs of the Hollins community.

Each month, I will lead a conversation related to inclusion. These conversations will focus on either a text or a process we need to engage in to further our goals at Hollins.

University Leadership and the Board of Trustees

Several conversation participants indicated the importance of ensuring that all levels of the institution are engaged in professional development. To that end, the October meeting of the Hollins University Board of Trustees will include professional development provided by [Angela Vallot](#). Each agenda of upcoming board meetings will also have a learning segment related to inclusion.

The Cabinet and I must also have a visible learning agenda related to inclusion. We will create this agenda by October 1, 2020. Likewise, one of my annual goals, against which I will be assessed at the end of the academic year, is explicitly related to inclusion.

Providing Leadership in the Office of Inclusivity and Diversity (OID)

The need for a senior-level leadership position related to inclusion, equity, and diversity was frequently referenced. There was a mandate to fill the open position in the Office of Inclusivity and Diversity (OID) quickly. Several participants also commented on how essential it is to resource this role and the OID appropriately. Likewise, there was a call to ensure the work of inclusion is not left to only one or two people on campus. I commit to filling the open position now, exempting it from the hiring freeze, and to providing the resources needed to do the work. There is also clear evidence that the community needs to better understand the work the Office of Cultural and Community Engagement has done and continues to do as well as other offices addressing inclusion.

In early September, I will host two open sessions to invite feedback about the priorities, scope, and structure of the OID position. I am asking that those who attend the session to review articles we will provide that inform how we can optimize the role and effectiveness of the position. I will also welcome input regarding the OID's current structure and our overall structure for our inclusion work. Feedback can also be sent to inclusion@hollins.edu.

A search committee will be appointed, and a draft of the position description will be shared with the community by mid-September. Once finalized, the position will be posted, and a national search will take place.

PROVIDING AN INCLUSIVE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Each conversation about inclusion involved robust discussion about the importance of inclusion in the classroom. It was made clear that some students find the classroom environment challenging as it relates to inclusion. Specifically, several people mentioned the lasting, negative impact students of color experience when they are either called upon to respond to difficult moments in the classroom or when their concerns are dismissed.

To address this issue, there was a resounding call for:

- An inclusive curriculum
- Diversity training for faculty
- The importance of faculty managing difficult conversations in the classroom

Concerns expressed about navigating issues of race in the classroom were clear and compelling. We must partner with and support our faculty as they do the necessary work to ensure our students can learn and find the classroom a space conducive to learning and belonging. In response to this concern, I have asked LeeRay Costa, professor of gender and women's studies and director of faculty development, in partnership with the AAC&U, to identify a series of workshops that can be deployed to support navigating race and inclusion related to classroom conversations and dynamics.

Reconciliation

A theme shared throughout the conversations related to acknowledging the hurt experienced by people of color on the Hollins campus. Going forward, we will explore a restorative justice model to support our inclusion work.

Belonging

Many students, faculty, staff, and alumnae of color reported feeling as though they do not truly belong on campus, with several participants feeling disrespected or unsafe. There was a particular unease about not having the resources or structures needed to address concerns, and many spoke about the fear of retaliation if they express concerns using currently available structures.

**“IT CAN'T BE ONE PERSON'S
JOB. EACH DEPARTMENT,
EACH PERSON NEEDS
TO LOOK AT WHAT THEIR
POSITION IS AND HOW THEY
CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.”**

Ensuring a sense of belonging, offering the professional development to extend that sense of belonging to all, and providing the structures and support for redress when needed are essential cultural shifts we will undertake. We will begin this work in fall 2020.

Building renaming

There was a significant sense of urgency around renaming certain buildings on the Hollins campus. Each stakeholder group reported that we need to actively explore the names of our buildings and engage a process for renaming. In partnership with the [Working Group on Slavery and Its Contemporary Legacies](#), we are already exploring what such a process and timeline might include. I have received the report from the working group and will update the community in September.

Institutional apology

While less pervasive in mentions than building renaming, several participants suggested we explore whether an institutional apology is needed. The Working Group on Slavery and Its Contemporary Legacies is currently drafting a proposal about what such an apology might include.

Affinity groups

As part of the process of reconciliation — or healing, as some referred to it — several participants noted that it would be helpful for faculty and staff to have affinity groups to which they could turn for support. For example, typical affinity groups include, but are not limited to, groups for African Americans, women, LatinX, or LGBTQIA groups. There are several [resources](#) about the importance of such groups in building [community](#) on college campuses. It is important to note that these groups are open to all community members and seek to build community and increase a sense of engagement.

STRUCTURES TO PROVIDE SUPPORT AND REDRESS

Grievance and harassment board

Throughout each conversation, participants raised concerns about — at best the lack of clarity, at worse the absence, of — structures to which they can turn for support and redress when they experience a hostile environment. It is clear that we need greater clarity about existing structures and that, perhaps, new structures are needed. This fall, we will review our harassment and grievance board's current structure to determine what barriers currently exist to using this structure successfully. We will also work together to determine how the structure of our inclusion work and the offices related to inclusion can be improved.

“I THINK HAVING CONVERSATIONS LIKE THIS ARE REALLY HELPFUL, SO I THINK BEING PROGRESSIVE AND BEING AHEAD OF THINGS – NOT REACTIVE, BUT PROACTIVE – IS IMPORTANT. RACISM IS NOT GOING AWAY ANYTIME SOON, BUT HOW CAN WE CREATE SAFE SPACES THAT MAKE HOLLINS A SAFE PLACE TO HAVE THESE CONVERSATIONS WITH FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND STAFF?”

Human Resources (HR)

Throughout the conversations, it was evident that there is a need to view human resources (HR) as a partner in our work around inclusion. Specifically, conversation participants wanted to ensure that our HR team has access to diversity training and that they are fully prepared and resourced to support those who need assistance. There was also a call for increased transparency about inclusion from HR, especially in position searches.

We will move forward with gathering voluntary demographic data from job position applicants and review the data to ensure we have diverse pools applying for positions. We will also provide HR with a robust program of professional development to support their growth. These opportunities will be available beginning in fall 2020.

Creating an inclusive community and culture

Much of the feedback received can readily be addressed through the assessment and refinement of existing structures or by aggressively implementing new policies and practices. However, long term, systemic, and cultural change are essential to ensure that the immediate tactics are embraced and become a valued part of the Hollins campus. This longer-term work has to begin now, but cannot be measured in days, weeks, or months. Instead, this is the work that will frame who we become and who we are in the long term. This work, currently less tangible and less easily defined, is essential.

Defining terms

Critical to having an inclusive culture on campus is shared agreement about terms and their meaning. Hollins currently has a series of defined terms. The terms may be found [here](#). In the fall of 2020, we will explore these terms and whether and how we want to adopt them across the university.

Inclusion strategic plan and vision

It is also clear that Hollins needs an institutional vision and plan as it relates to inclusion. The absence of this plan leads to confusion about our goals, uneven resource allocations, and conflicting priorities related to inclusion. Beginning with the Equity and Justice Day, we will develop a shared vision statement related to inclusion. Once the vision statement is articulated, over the course of the 2020-21 academic year, we will develop a long-range strategic plan, including metrics and an assessment plan. While we have much work to do, we will celebrate the steps we are taking and support our entire community in this work.

“THE PROBLEM OF UNDERREPRESENTATION IS ONE OF LITERAL UNDERREPRESENTATION; THE SAME POC FACULTY AND STAFF ARE CALLED ON A LOT, OVER AND OVER, TO SERVE ON DIVERSITY COMMITTEES, WHICH CREATES FATIGUE AND OVERLOAD.”

SUMMARY OF NEXT STEPS

To address the concerns shared, we will undertake the following steps over the next several months:

- I have asked Interim Vice Presidents Dan Derringer and Alison Ridley, in partnership with Faculty Chair Darla Schumm, to begin the process of joining the [Consortium for Faculty Diversity](#). This highly effective program enables institutions to accelerate the diversification of their faculty.
- Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Kerry Edmonds has been tasked with reaching out to Oregon State University to bring their [Search Advocates program](#) to Hollins University. Training to become a search advocate will commence in the fall. Beginning in January 2021, all search committees will be required to have a search advocate assigned to their committees.
- I have asked HR to submit a plan for supporting diverse searches, utilizing best practices, due to me by October 1.
- We will move forward with gathering voluntary demographic data from job position applicants and review the data to ensure we have diverse pools applying for positions. We will also provide HR with a robust program of professional development to support their growth. These opportunities will be available beginning in fall 2020.
- Upon the lifting of the current hiring freeze, we will prioritize a full-time counselor of color hire.
- A day-long Equity and Justice Day will take place on October 23, 2020, to provide a shared inclusion professional development opportunity for faculty, staff, and students.
- We will host a series of lunch-and-learns for the community, including faculty, staff, and students, to begin an ongoing dialogue about race and inclusion at Hollins.
- Each month, I will lead a conversation related to inclusion. Information about the discussions will be shared via email and on the [president's office webpage](#).
- The October meeting of the Hollins Board of Trustees will include training provided by [Angela Vallot](#). Each agenda of upcoming board meetings will also have a learning segment related to inclusion.
- By mid-September, we will have a job description for the OID position and be prepared to launch a national search to fill the position.

“IT’S GREAT THAT WE VALUE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY WORK. BUT WE NEED TO HAVE ACTION. THE ACTION PIECE HASN’T ALWAYS BEEN THERE. THERE’S BEEN AN INTENTION. CREATING AN ACTION PLAN WILL BE IMPORTANT TO AND FOR THE COMMUNITY.”

- By October 1, 2020, we will identify a series of workshops that can be deployed to support navigating race and inclusion-related classroom conversations and dynamics.
- We will determine a review process for the current structure of our harassment and grievance board to determine what barriers currently exist to using this structure successfully. This process recommendation will be due to me this fall.
- As a part of Equity and Inclusion Day, we will develop a shared vision statement related to inclusion. Once the vision statement is articulated, over the course of the 2020-21 academic year, we will develop a long-range strategic plan, including metrics and an assessment plan.

**“LOVE HOLLINS ENOUGH TO
WANT TO CHANGE IT.”**

CONCLUSION

I recognize that the work of inclusion is not new for Hollins and that this moment is one to amplify what has been done in the past and to build on history as we move forward. Hollins University has a strong foundation on which to build. And we have much work ahead of us. However, the work going forward cannot be relegated to a single person, group, or area. Each day, all of us must commit to doing this work and to commit to being vulnerable as we experience the necessary discomfort of the work in order to grow. We must be intentional in our actions. The work of culture change cannot be done from a reactionary stance, in response to demands, or by calling one another out. The work of systemic change is the work of authentic engagement.

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